



HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS NETWORK

A Community Project of Public Health - Seattle & King County

April 8, 2003

News for Community Agencies Working With Homeless People

**An Update from HCHN for Shelters, Day Centers, Housing Programs,
and Other Programs that Work with People Experiencing Homelessness**

1. Tuberculosis Outbreak Continues

Tuberculosis among homeless people in Seattle continues to rise. The outbreak began in 2002, when 30 cases were reported among homeless people compared to an average of 12 cases in prior years. As of early April 2003, Public Health's TB Clinic reports that there are 19 cases among homeless people. The cases are primarily among single adults in downtown Seattle. The TB Clinic and Health Care for the Homeless Network are working closely with the specific homeless and housing programs where people with active TB have been identified. We are identifying and evaluating those who have been in close contact with people who have active TB. The Public Health TB Clinic has hired a special outbreak coordinator, Linda Lake. If you have questions about Public Health's response to the TB outbreak, contact Linda at (206) 731-4578 or the TB program at (206) 731-4579. In the months ahead we will be reviewing our overall TB control recommendations for homeless programs. We appreciate your patience and your support.

What can you do to reduce the risk of TB transmission at your facility?

- Think TB. Be aware of clients with TB symptoms: persistent cough, fever, weight loss, and fatigue. Bring such clients to the attention of the facility supervisor or nurse, or refer them to a nearby community or public health clinic (such as Pioneer Square Clinic, Pike Market Medical Clinic, Seattle Indian Health Board, Downtown Public Health Center, etc.). These clinics work closely with the TB Clinic and can help ensure that clients with symptoms get evaluated.
- Although most of the cases are among adults, children and youth can get TB also. Children often do not have the same symptoms of TB as adults. In general, be aware of kids who are not feeling well, especially for more than 10 days, or who are not thriving. Help them access a health care provider.
- Cooperate with Public Health and the TB Program if an active case is identified at your facility.

In the community as a whole, King County is experiencing a 30-year high in TB cases, with 158 total cases last year, and 40 cases so far in 2003. Most of the recent cases are among homeless people and foreign-born adults. Four cases have been reported among students in Seattle schools. TB is preventable and curable. **Want to learn more about TB?** Visit the Public Health TB program web site at <http://www.metrokc.gov/health/tb/>.

Also feel free to contact Health Care for the Homeless Network's public health nurse, Heather Barr, at (206) 296-4656 for more information. However, because Heather is out in the community working on the TB outbreak, please have patience!

2. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

As you may know, there are suspected cases of SARS reported in Washington State. As of this writing, the cases in Washington have been only among travelers to certain countries in Asia. Respiratory illnesses are very common in King County this time of year, especially among homeless people, but no cases of SARS have been reported among homeless people in King County. Please consider the possibility that someone has SARS when he or she has fever and respiratory illnesses within 10 days of travel to affected areas in Asia, or when he or she has fever and respiratory illnesses within 10 days after contact with an ill traveler from the affected areas in Asia. Persons who meet these conditions should be referred to a health care facility. Give that facility a call in advance of the person's arrival at the facility. For current information, visit the Public Health web site at: <http://www.metrokc.gov/health/sars/>

As always, if you have clients with fevers or respiratory problems you can refer them to a health care provider. Free or low-cost health services are available from an on-site nurse (if your program has one), a nearby community clinic, or a public health clinic. Urgent and emergency care is available at Harborview Medical Center and other hospitals. Remember that **good hand hygiene** is important in preventing the spread of communicable diseases. It is particularly important that staff, guests, and volunteers wash their hands thoroughly with soap and running warm water after handling any body substance (i.e., urine, stool, drool, blood, etc.), after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. Keep bathrooms well stocked with soap and paper towels. Alcohol hand rubs may be useful for cleaning hands when the hands are not visibly soiled and when there is no immediate access to soap and running water (may be useful for outreach workers, for example). **If you would like assistance in reviewing or establishing a universal precautions policy for your homeless program, contact Heather Barr, Public Health Nurse, at (206) 296-4656.**

3. Other News

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has released a "Comprehensive Plan to End Chronic Homelessness." The plan is available through the HHS web site at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/progsys/homeless/index.shtml>
- The March 2003 issue of Healing Hands, published by the HCH Clinician's Network, is entitled: Dealing with Disability: Cognitive Impairments & Homelessness <http://www.nhchc.org/Network/HealingHands/index.htm>
- A detailed curriculum on training for outreach workers is available at <http://www.nhchc.org/Curriculum/index.htm>. The curriculum was developed by Ken Kraybill, MSW. Ken is the Clinician Specialist for the National HCH Council.

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS NETWORK is a community project of Public Health—Seattle & King County. We contract with partner agencies to send care providers to work with homeless people in over 60 locations countywide, including shelters, day centers, transitional housing programs, and clinics. Services offered include primary care, mental health and substance abuse services, and case management. Public Health clinics and programs also provide care for homeless people. **Administrative office: Public Health—Seattle & King County, 999 Third Avenue, Suite 1200, Seattle WA 98014. (206) 296-5091.**